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Legends Of Indy Wrestling #1 - 'Surfer' Ray Odyssey!!!

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R.A.W Media's Bean Lebouc kicks off his brand new interview series 'Legends Of Indy Wrestling' by catching up with one of the most recognised names from the 90's indy wrestling scene 'Surfer' Ray Odyssey to reflect on what is was like, during that time, on the independent wrestling scene.

Bean Lebouc - For those who may not know 'Surfer' Ray Odyssey tell us a bit about yourself and how you got started in the Pro Wrestling business?

'Surfer' Ray Odyssey - First off I would like to thank you for having me as I haven't been on TV since the 90's (and I'm not counting the internet) so I am always flattered

when someone asks anything about me in 2023.

I started training at the world famous Monster Factory, in 1987, when I was 19 years old.

I spent a year at West Virginia Weslyan College however I decided that it wasn't for me so I went a half mile down the road to an airplane hanger that was home to Larry Sharpes Monster Factory. I grew up in Mt. Laurel and was thrilled when I heard the Monster Factory was just down the road from my house.

Larry gave me a tryout and it was basically running the ropes, taking a few back bumps and some agility drills.

One day he called me into his office and said "Ray, I think you have potential but you already have one strike against you and that's that you're short and there is no coaching that out of you". See when I tried out I was barely 5'9", and 200 pounds, so Larry said "If you really want to be someone in this business you have to get bigger and you have to do something to make people want to see a 5'9" wrestler".

Remember this was the 80's, the age of Hulk Hogan, so you weren't looked at unless you were at least 6'2", 250 pounds and ripped.

But there has always been comedy guys, in the business, and I knew I could get in if I could do comedy.

My favorite movie growing up was 'Fast Times At Ridgemont High' because Jeff Spicolli was so cool!!!! When I was in high school EVERYONE quoted his lines, from the movie, so I figured if I do a surfer gimmick, and talk like Jeff Spicolli, maybe I could sneak my way into the business.

While I was training, at the Monster Factory, I met my mentor Charlie Fulton. He not only taught me the moves in the ring but, more importantly, taught me the way to act outside of it as well. When I was just starting out, and trying to get bookings, Charlie would say "If you see this guy, or this guy would be on the show, mention my name and tell them I trained you as it might help a little" and this really helped a lot. I would walk into a locker room, see some veterans and introduce myself. I could see the look of disgust in their eyes and it was like "What in the hell are you doing here kid?" but as soon as I said "Charlie Fulton trained me" those looks changed.

I remember when I started working in Memphis, in 1988, and I walked in the locker room and got those stink eyes looking at me. I went to shake Robert Fullers hand and I said "Charlie Fulton trained me" and then, all of the sudden, the looks changed. Robert smiled and said "Well hell son, if old Charlie trained you, you can't be all bad" and, with that, I was accepted as part of the crew.

BL - What was the independent scene like back in the 90's?

SRO - Indy wrestling was white hot, in the 90's, and I was working with the Savoldi's ICW/IWCCW in the late 80's/early 90's.

The ICW had great TV however that didn't mean that what you watched was great, on the contrary, most of it was bad however the show was everywhere, and not just across the United States, it also got into Europe and lots of other countries overseas.

To this day I still have no idea how Mario managed to get that lousy show shown all over the world but, overall, it was great for me.

Even though I was no Dean Malenko, in the ring, I was entertaining enough, and could cut good enough promos, to be a top guy even at 220 pounds.

Remember this was the time of the giants, in Pro Wrestling, so I was proud of myself for breaking through and making a name for myself in the business.

Anyway back to your question. The indy scene, in the 90's, was great and there were places like ECW and ICW that had TV shows, on Sportschannel America, that ran on most cable networks and I was in both promotions so when I worked an Indy, on the east coast, fans knew me from those TV shows.

That's what made indy wrestling so great, back then, there was enough wrestling, on some small cable TV outlets, and maybe an Indy show came to your home town and someone would be like "Guess what...I saw 'Surfer' Ray Odyssey on TV and now he's wrestling at my high school and I can see him in person".

Indy wrestling, in the 90's, was so hot and I made a lot of money then.

BL - You worked for both ECW, when it was Eastern and Extreme, and the NWA during the mid-90's. What were those two companies like to work for during those periods of time as ECW was still in it's infancy and the NWA wasn't in the same position it had been, during it's heyday, in the 80's and early 90's?

SRO - I worked for both ECW and NWA (the bootleg version), in the mid 90's, as well as IWCCW, who had great TV at the time, however the tough part was all three wanted me to work for them, exclusively, when business got really really hot.

I was happy working for all three but Paul E., Dennis Coralluzzo and Mario Savoldi all thought I should work exclusively with them and as an Indy wrestler you worked with everyone.

Back in 1994 ECW ran about 8 shows a month and that it. It was not a full time gig like when I went to Memphis, in 1988, and worked 6 days a week. IWCCW was also good for about 8 shows a month as well. Then there was NWA New Jersey which ran about 4 shows a month.There were also other little shows that ran once a month that I would get booked on to.

Funny thing was that it wasn't like the territories as you didn't work Tuesday or Wednesday. The indies I worked were basically just weekends so there were a ton of double shots.

I'd work a show for IWCCW, on Friday night, and then get ready for an NWA show, on Saturday afternoon and then work for ECW on the Saturday night, then back to NWA on Sunday afternoon, followed by IWCCW, on the Sunday night, so stuff like that.

During this time, when the IWCCW was running hard, we worked our way up the east coast, on a Thursday around Boston, then up into Maine before heading back to New Jersey for TV.

I both liked, and disliked, working for ECW and IWCCW in the 90's. Both had great TV shows and I was seen EVERYWHERE so I would end up being booked by other little indy shows off the back of there TV shows. Plus I was getting good money.

Now on to what I disliked. Paul E. would only talk to you on the phone when HE wanted to talk! So if I was trying to get booked, for an ECW show, sometimes I got the "Let me call you right back" line and it was very frustrating. I was just trying to fill out my schedule for the month and if you didn't want to book me, no problem, but just tell me and I'll take another booking that day. But it didn't work like that. Paul did not give you honest answers EVER!!! He was tough to deal with.

Now on to what I disliked about IWCCW.

Mario was a guy that paid you what he promised but the problem was that sometimes he would book you for 8 days and only 5, or 6, came through and you didn't know until the last minute so I couldn't take that booking in Delaware, that I was offered, but turned down because IWCCW was running that day.

NWA was bad too. I have to say that Dennis Coralluzzo, who ran a lot of shows, was nice to me, when I got booked on them, but Dennis was notorious for stuff like "Sorry Ray, the house was bad. I know I promised you $150 but I can only give you $125. I

swear I'll make it up to you the next show". The next show comes around and I get my $150 guarentee but I ask about the $25, I'm still owed from the last show, and again Dennis would apologise and say he will make it up at the next show. This happened a lot!!!

The thing that pissed me off is that when he booked guys like Jerry Lawler, Doug Gilbert or The Warlord, they never got those stories. He only screwed his local guys and though it wasn't for tens of thousands, like Paul E did to Dreamer or Douglas, if you are promised a price then you should get that price no matter how small, or large, the price tag is.

BL - From that period of time who would you say were some of your favourite oppenents and did you have a particular promotion that you liked working for as well?

SRO - Favourite opponent is very easy...Taz.

We worked so easy together and we didn't need to talk much in the locker room. We seemed to just click when we got in the ring. He was a great opponent for me. It seemed like I only worked against Taz for like 6 months straight. Even if we weren't working for ICW I'd work for some small indy promotion, in Rhode Island, I'd get to

the building and see Taz. I would say to him "I guess it's me and you again tonight". We tore some buildings up!!!

Promotions wise I liked working for Mike O'Brien, for NWA Northeast, he was a good guy and the shows had big crowds and were good paydays.

I liked working for Bob Raskin and Rob Russen, who ran New York and New Jersey, because these guys would book big stars like Sgt. Slaughter, Paul Orndorff, Bob Orton and many others. I was still pretty young in the business but when I was working a lot of shows, with these guys, I started getting excepted. It was always nice that the big stars would know your name when I walked in the locker room.

There was Tony Rumble. When he left the IWCCW he formed his own promotion, around 1994, in Boston. He would book me because of our history together. They were great shows and he drew a lot of big houses throughout the 90's. If it wasn't for his untimely death I really believe that his promotion would have really taken off and got to be even bigger than it was. Tony was so smart and put on great shows. I still miss my old friend and he was such a great talent.

Another guy was Blaine Desantes who ran PCW in Pennsylvania. What I liked about him was that he brought me in and used me like a top star and not just a light heavyweight like a lot of other promotions did. Don't get me wrong that was fine, and I didn't mind being the light heavyweight comedy guy as I got booked a lot in that role, but Blaine really took me more seriously than just a small guy doing comedy. He had a tournament, for the PCW heavyweight title, and I ended up in the finals against a guy named Glenn Jacobs!!! Of course everyone knows that Glenn went on to be one of the biggest stars in wrestling as Kane!!! Anyway Glenn was still doing the Issac Yankem gimmick, in WWF (now WWE), so Blaine decided to book us, in the finals, and told me I was going over on Glenn!!! I was a little surprised as Glenn was a star, in the WWF, and he was putting me over on him. I asked him if Glenn was ok with it and he said "Yes". I asked what the finish would be and he said "Why don't you go talk to him and figure it out" so I'm like I have to tell this star that I'm the 5'9" surfer guy going over you tonight and how are we going to do it??? I have to say I was a bit nervous as Glenn is huge, maybe 6'7", and I am going over him!!! I introduced myself while he was in the locker room painting his teeth because, back then, his character was a deranged dentist with nasty teeth. So we talked a little and I asked him if he had any problem with putting me over especially because he was being pushed in WWF and honestly he couldn't have been more professional about it. He said "Don't worry about it as they (WWF) are going to change my gimmick soon so I don't have to protect it as much". I don't thing that he even knew, at that point, that his gimmick

change would be the Undertaker's brother Kane. He was awesome in the ring. He put me over, 1-2-3 in the middle of the ring, and was such a pro about it. One of my favorite matches and I had to thank Blaine for having the confidence in me to put his heavyweight belt on me. It also meant that I faced all the bigger names that he brought in as well. I remember working with 'Iron' Mike Sharpe, Bob Orton, and others, before finally dropping the belt to Chris Candido. It made me a legit Heavyweight with the wrestling magazines too. I remember reading how I was beating some of the big names, in Pro Wrestling, in some small promotion in Pennslyvania.

The last one is Tommy Fiero and his ISPW promotion. He was a guy I liked working for. The promotion was doing pretty well, in the late 90's/early 00's, and he ran shows in New Jersey and because that's where I lived there wasn't much travel involved. He is still running shows today and has his very own wrestling shop where he sells wrestling memorabilia and does signings with past, and current, wrestling stars. I also had my retirement match with him. He managed to coax me out of semi retirement and gave me a Lifetime Achievement award. I had my final match in front of friends, and family, and hung up the wetsuit for good. One of the biggest reasons I took the match was because my 10 year old son (who was 8 at the time) had only seen me wrestle on old tapes, or on the internet, so it gave him the chance to see his dad wrestle live at least once.

BL - Do you think that publications like Pro Wrestling Illustrated were beneficial to the independent scene and, more specifically, the wrestlers back then?

SRO - I thought it was great for guys like Bill Apter and George Napolitano to attend shows, take pictures and write articles about the east coast wrestling scene. It gave us

a legitimacy when the shows were talked about in the wrestling magazines. It was also cool that Bill Apter took the time to do the research and include a lot of the indy guys in their annual 'PWI 500'. I have to say that I totally marked out when I saw, in 1992, that I made it to number 170. Then, in 1994, I was 171 and that's pretty damn good for a guy that never worked for a major promotion. I looked at other guys in WWF and WCW, at that time, and I was around the same ranking, or better, than guys that had full time jobs in the business!!! Still pretty cool to this day when I think about it.

BL - Overall would you say you enjoyed your time on the indies in the 90's?

SRO - I loved working the indies, in the 90's, as there were lots of big houses and lots of big paydays. The 90's, in the Northeast, was a hotbed for Pro Wrestling. I saw a lot of the same guys in a lot of the promotions. Guys like Tom Brandi, Mike 'King' Kahlua, Devon Storm (Crowbar), The Misfits, Twiggy Ramirez, Inferno Kid, Ace Darling, Rik Ratchet, Tre, Lance Diamond and more. It was almost like a territory. I saw the same guys, up and down the east coast, at a lot of these shows. A very fun time for me plus we were making good money and drawing nice houses.

BL - We would like to thank you for your time. Is there anything else you would like to add and where can people find out more information of Ray Odyssey?

SRO - I'd like to add that I'm retired and I had my last match in 2021. I am going to be one of the few wrestlers that stays retired.

This summer I worked as a guest referee in my favorite town Wildwood, New Jersey, at the Convention Center.

I have been doing voiceover work for a Roku Network's wrestling channel, by SavMar Productions, that is Mario Savoldi's tape collection that is being put out by them. I love doing it and even though it doesn't pay much who knows if it could lead to something else.

I am still being called and asked if I want to take some bookings which, to me, is crazy as I am done with wrestling but it's like the mafia because every time I try to get out it keeps pulling me back in!!! It's like can't everyone just let me fade off into

the sunset? It seems like each week I get a new offer to somehow be back involved in the wrestling business but I guess it's flattering as I was a 5'9" guy, that did a goofy gimmick, in an age that you had to be a monster to get over and, somehow, I got to be a part of this great business that I really didn't deserve to be a part of. It was a great time in my life and I still get to relive it, with people like you, that still care about what I'm up to and like to listen to my old stories.

Lastly I have a page on a website called, kayfabememories.com, where I talk to fans, and answer questions, so if there is anything you want to ask about the great wrestling days, of the 80's and 90's, drop me a line and I make sure that I answer everyone's questions. Thanks for listening to my old stories!!!

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